

News Release

CLEVELAND NATIONAL FOREST



10845 RANCHO BERNARDO ROAD, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92127
VOICE (858) 673-6180, FAX (858) 673-6192, CRS/TTY 711

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CONTACT: Brian Harris, CNF, 858-674-2984/619-937-1462; Brad Eells, FFLA, 661-747-5517
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Cleveland National Forest and the Forest Fire Lookout Association Enter into Partnership

San Diego, CA –December 3, 2008... The Cleveland National Forest and the Forest Fire Lookout Association (FFLA), San Diego - Riverside Chapter are pleased to announce they are entering into a cooperative partnership for the preservation and staffing of the remaining fire lookout towers on the Cleveland National Forest.

This is a win-win situation for everyone involved,” said Will Metz, Forest Supervisor of the Cleveland National Forest, “In a time of smaller budgets, and as we are facing great challenges concerning wildfire, we are very pleased that a volunteer organization such as the FFLA has stepped in to help!” A ceremonial signing of the partnership documents will be conducted on Friday, December 5, 2008 at the High Point Lookout tower on Palomar Mountain. The public is invited to attend and should meet at the Palomar Mountain Forest Service Fire Station at 9:00 a.m. The short trip to the lookout tower will require four wheel drive vehicles.

Under the partnership, the FFLA will conduct site specific projects that first restore the remaining lookout towers on the Forest, and then through volunteer staffing, the lookouts will be staffed throughout the height of the fire season in southern California. The first project to be undertaken is the High Point Lookout on Palomar Mountain. Other projects will be evaluated in the future. The timeline for restoring and staffing High Point Lookout is on a fast track – the restoration work will be conducted over this winter, and staffing will begin in May of 2009.

“There is a need for staffing of these lookout towers within the Forest. We have found that having a staffed lookout can give us a few extra minutes to respond to wildfire incidents,” said Brian Harris, Forest Service spokesman and Volunteer Coordinator for this partnership. “Lookouts also provide an additional set of eyes that can over-watch a wildfire and provide valued information to fire managers, as well as providing a critical communications link.” Modern technology may exist such as remote control cameras, but having a seeing and thinking person on site can be vital during wildfire events.

The FFLA, a 501 (c) (3) non-profit corporation founded in 1990, is an organization involved in research of former forest fire lookout sites, ground cabins and early forest fire detection methods. The organization encourages the restoration of forest fire lookouts, and some projects are undertaken by local chapters such is the case here in San Diego

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and Riverside Counties.

Brad Eells of the local FFLA chapter is the driving force behind the partnership. “The FFLA is proud to enter into this partnership with the Cleveland National Forest,” said Eells. Nearly 8000 fire lookouts were built across the United States, less than 800 have been documented as still standing today. “Our San Diego – Riverside Chapter will restore the structures and staff them with volunteers to provide additional fire detection capability, and historical and natural resource interpretation for forest visitors and area residents,” added Eells.

The Cleveland National Forest once had 11 lookouts within the Forest, and 6 located on state, county or private lands that served the Forest. Now only five lookouts remain intact. The five remaining lookouts are as follows: Boucher Hill Lookout within Palomar Mountain State Park; Hot Springs Mountain Lookout within the Los Coyotes Reservation; High Point Lookout on the Palomar Ranger District; and Lyons Peak and Los Pinos on the Descanso Ranger District. Fulltime staffing of Forest Service lookouts, except for Los Pinos Lookout, ended in the late 1980s and early 1990s. (This partnership will only serve High Point and Lyons Peak lookouts – Los Pinos lookout will remain staffed by Forest employees).

The FFLA San Diego – Riverside Chapter is in need of materials, funds and volunteers, and is pursuing a number of grants and donations. “We need several thousand dollars to restore the structures to an accurate period look,” said Eells. Persons or organizations that can help with restoration funding and materials, or would like to become a trained Fire Lookout Host may contact Eells via Email at: highpointlookout@yahoo.com or phone at 661-747-5517. In become a Fire Lookout Host, 16 hours of classroom training is required with 8 hours of “in tower training” needed to complete certification.

Eells notes the very successful San Bernardino National Forest Association – Fire Lookout Hosts group that operates 7 fire lookout towers with nearly 300 volunteers during the fire season. “They provide a number of first fire reports every year and host thousands of visitors at each lookout,” said Eells. The Angeles and Sequoia National Forests also operate successful fire lookout partnerships.

The FFLA and the Forest Service are very interested in talking with any staff that may have served at the lookouts or anyone who may have photographs, documents or items related to the lookouts. We are particularly interested in the Osborne Fire-Finders that are used to report the fire locations. Several were removed from local towers and have not been located.

The current structure at High Point, A CL-100 Standard Forest Service design on a 67 foot tower was built and opened in 1964. The first tower there was constructed in 1935. The Cleveland National Forest was established in 1908, and Hot Springs Mountain hosted the Forest’s first lookout in 1912. Lyons Peak was built in 1913 and Los Pinos in 1925. The current structures on Lyons Peak and Los Pinos are identical to High Point, but on 30 foot towers built in 1964.

The lookouts at High Point, Boucher Hill and Los Pinos have been added to the FFLA’s National Historic Lookout Register. Applications for Lyons Peak and Hot Springs Mountain are in process.

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The chapter has registered an url, and will soon post information at: www.socalfirelookouts.org

Additional Resources:

- Cleveland National Forest: www.fs.fed.us/r5/cleveland
- Forest Fire Lookout Association national website: www.ffla.org
- National Historic Lookout Register: www.nhlnr.org
- San Bernardino National Forest Association – Fire Lookout Hosts: www.sbnfa.org/firelookouts.php
- Angeles National Forest Fire Lookout Association: www.anffla.org/
- The Buck Rock Foundation – Sequoia National Forest: www.buckrock.org

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